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SUBJECT: BURKINA FASO: VENDORS AT THE CENTRAL MARKET
ANGERED OVER NEW SECURITY MEASURES

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: On November 4th market vendors at the Ouagadougou central market went on strike to protest new more stringent security measures enacted by the Mayor of Ouagadougou. The mayor wants the market to be organized, safe and tidy, while the vendors prefer a mild form of chaos and more freedom of movement. Most importantly the vendors do not want the police to be present, nor do they agree with the new security measures that include a pedestrian area around the market and obligation to pay vendor booth fees. Mediation efforts quickly fell apart resulting in an impasse between the Mayor's office and the vendors. The risk now is that violence may erupt again as frustration grows. END SUMMARY.

New market, new tensions

¶2. (U) The Rood Woko central market of Ouagadougou burned down in May 2003. It remained closed pending funding and total renovation until officially re-opening in April 2009. During the six years interim period vendors were free to set up shop and sell their goods where they wanted. Since the market re-opened, ad-hoc vendors have been chased away and only those official vendors with a license to sell are authorized at Rood Woko.

¶3. (U) While at first everyone seemed happy to see business resume, problems quickly popped up, and as a result tensions between the market vendors, police officials and the mayor's office have escalated. Vendors do not want to pay for rental of their booths, they believe that the pedestrian area that surrounds the market is bad for business, and argue that in Africa, markets need to be somewhat chaotic to attract customers. Orderliness, they offer, is not good for business. Business is down and the market sellers blame the Mayor and his security apparatus for it (Note: Mayor Simon Compaore is very close to President Blaise Compaore. End Note).

¶4. (U) On June 16th 2009, only weeks after the market reopened, vendors and roaming market sellers attacked the municipal police tasked with ensuring order and security around the market area. The local police was ill equipped to deal with this level of violence and fled the area seeking refuge in a police station several blocks away. During that time, their guard posts were destroyed and several of their vehicles burned. The Mayor called riot police to the scene to restore order. The Mayor waited until November 3rd, nearly five months, before ordering the local police to once again take up duty around the market place. Vendors immediately reiterated their desire to see the police driven away permanently from the market stating that a market place is not synonymous to military barracks and that the police were unwelcome.

Business is not good, is the police at fault?

¶5. (U) According to vendors, while some customers have

returned to the market, business is not as good as it was prior to 2003. Once loyal customers have had nearly six years to frequent other markets and are slow to return. Vendors are not selling what they expected and have blamed the orderliness of the "new market" and police presence for it. Chaos is good for a market they affirm, order and police presence is not. Still according to vendors, the designated pedestrian area around the market place further complicates their job by chasing away prospective buyers or forcing them to park far away and walk a few blocks into the market.

Mediation efforts fail, demands remain

¶6. (U) Among other demands, the vendors want:

- No more access barriers blocking car traffic.
- Elimination of the pedestrian area surrounding the market.
- Permission to park cars and motorcycles close to and within the market area.
- Permission for ambulatory vendors to walk around and sell their goods.
- Creation of more and larger vendor booth areas within the market.
- Lower rent charges for booths.
- Electrification of more areas within the market.
- Cold storage for butchers.
- Departure of police from the market area.
- Opening of a market infirmary.

While bilateral negotiations between the vendors union (ACOMA) and the Mayor's office began early November, they

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quickly fell apart. The Vendor's union proposed sixteen measures but apparently at least ten were rejected by the Mayor's office. Currently the Mayor's office and the vendors are at an impasse with neither party giving in. In retaliation for the Mayor's perceived lack of sympathy for the vendors' plight, and for his refusal to even consider most of their proposed suggestions, the union of market sellers declared a "dead market day" and refused to open up their shops on November 4.

¶7. (U) COMMENT: The Rood Woko market has already erupted in violence four times since it reopened six months ago. The Mayor is concerned with client and vendor security and has argued that the very reason the market burned down in 2003 is that chaos, anarchy and insecurity reigned -- fire trucks and police vehicles were unable to reach the scene of the fire quickly because vendor stalls, cars and donkey carts blocked their access. By the time they reached the source of the fire it had spread and burned the market down to the ground. Compaore wants to ensure this does not happen again. The fear though now is that if vendors' frustration continues coupled with business volume well below expectations, then violence may once again erupt in the market area.

¶8. (SBU) Another hypothesis, echoed in the local press, is that the market security/pedestrian debate is a smokescreen for internal party political struggle. The vendors, it is said, are aligned with key leaders of the FEDAB/BC political group, itself a component of the Mayor's own CDP political party (Note: CDP, the Congress for Democracy and Change, is the Presidential ruling Party. End Note). Political analysts have offered that it is more than a discussion about market access, it is in fact a political struggle aimed at bringing the Mayor down and helping him lose the next municipal elections.

DOYLE